United Nations A/C.1/56/PV.6

General Assembly
Fifty-sixth session

Official Records

First Committee
6th meeting
Thursday, 11 October 2001, 10 a.m.
New York

Chairman: Mr. Erdös ..... (Hungary)

The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Agenda items 64 to 84 (*continued*)

General debate on all disarmament and international security items

Mr. Sychov (Belarus) (*spoke in Russian*): May I, on behalf of the delegation of the Republic of Belarus, congratulate you, Mr. Chairman, on your election to the chairmanship of the First Committee. We are very pleased at seeing a representative of the Group of Eastern European States in charge of the work of the First Committee. You can rely on our full support and cooperation.

The tragic events of 11 September have shocked the world community. Our delegation, representing a nation that lost nearly one third of its sons and daughters in the Second World War, extends its condolences to the Government of the United States, the American people and the relatives of those who perished during the terrorist attacks. The September tragedy clearly demonstrated the new challenges and threats of the twenty-first century and the clear links that exist between the problems of international security, disarmament and terrorism.

It is necessary to ensure strict control over existing stockpiles of both weapons of mass destruction and their components and conventional weapons. The implementation by States of their obligations in the field of international security and disarmament — and above all those under the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC) and the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) — is becoming a key factor. In this connection, the delegation of the Republic of Belarus reaffirms its commitment to fulfilling its international obligations under all international multilateral disarmament and arms control agreements, including those in the field of weapons of mass destruction.

The compromise on nuclear disarmament issues achieved at the 2000 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) has provided the international community with a clear vision of the steps that need to be taken in the near future, including next year at the first session of the Preparatory Committee for the 2005 NPT Review Conference.

The Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) should also enter into force as soon as possible. Our delegation attaches particular importance to ensuring the universality of this Treaty, and believes that it is extremely important for the Conference to be held in November 2001 on facilitating the entry into force of the CTBT to succeed.

Belarus, as a State that voluntarily rejected the opportunity to continue to possess nuclear weapons and which completed the withdrawal of such weapons from its territory in 1997, is convinced that it is necessary to provide legally binding assurances to non-nuclear-weapon States. At the same time, we welcome the unilateral declarations made by nuclear-weapon States with respect to their policies, whereby they would give

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the interpretation of speeches delivered in the other languages. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room C-178. Corrections will be issued after the end of the session in a consolidated corrigendum.

01-57520 (E)

up the use or the threat of use of nuclear weapons against non-nuclear-weapon States.

Belarus continues to fully observe its international obligations under agreements in the field of nuclear disarmament. In February 2001, the final inspection under the Treaty between the United States of America and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics on the Elimination of their Intermediate-Range and Shorter-Range Missiles (INF) took place in Belarus. That confirmed our country's strict observance of all the Treaty's provisions. The Treaty has played a significant role in reducing the military threat and strengthening strategic stability, peace and international security.

The Republic of Belarus is pursuing a responsible policy in the area of exports control. The admission of our country to the Nuclear Suppliers Group, in the year 2000, is proof of our country's full compliance with internationally recognized norms in the area of exports control.

Preserving and strictly complying with the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty (ABM) are the most important components in maintaining the strategic stability that drives the global disarmament processes. Deploying a national anti-ballistic missile defence system in violation of the ABM Treaty will undermine the existing nuclear non-proliferation regime and will affect in the most adverse way the entire system of global strategic stability that has taken decades to form.

Another extremely important issue is the prohibition of the production of fissile materials for weapons purposes. The Conference on Disarmament should begin negotiations on this problem as soon as possible. The earliest possible establishment of a subsidiary body at the Conference on Disarmament will make it possible to fully focus on the consideration of this issue in all its aspects.

Belarus believes that nuclear disarmament should be complemented by practical steps aimed at strengthening the nuclear non-proliferation regime, including by consolidating and setting up new nuclear-weapon-free zones. We continue to believe that the initiative of Belarus to establish a nuclear-weapon-free zone in Central and Eastern Europe is extremely important to the promotion of regional and global security and stability. We are convinced that the time will come when this initiative will become a reality. The delegation of Belarus intends to continue to seek agreement on this issue, including at the current session of the General Assembly. Belarus is open to cooperation on this issue with all of the States in the region and with other Member States of the United Nations.

Belarus is convinced that practical measures aimed at achieving nuclear disarmament could determine the entire course of agreed actions undertaken by the international community in the field of nuclear disarmament. The nuclear threat should be reduced through consistent step-by-step disarmament measures, with the eventual elimination of nuclear weapons as a final goal.

The Republic of Belarus has been pursuing a responsible and consistent policy aimed at fulfilling its international obligations, including those under the Conventional Forces in Europe Treaty (CFE). Having eliminated — despite extreme economic and financial hardships — nearly 10 per cent of all the heavy military equipment designated for destruction under the Treaty, Belarus has made a significant contribution to the strengthening of regional and global trust and cooperation. Belarus was also the first State member of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe to have ratified the Agreement on Adaptation of the Treaty on Conventional Forces in Europe in 2000. The consistency of our policies was also reaffirmed by our ratification of the Open Skies Treaty in 2001.

Belarus supports the extension of transparency measures on armaments and military expenditure. Of special importance is broad participation by all Member States in the United Nations standardized reporting instrument on military expenditure, which would help ease international tension, strengthen confidence among States and promote the conclusion of specific agreements in the field of disarmament. Consistent with that position, Belarus regularly submits data to the United Nations Register of Conventional Arms.

Belarus is convinced that a gradual movement from simple to more complex bilateral and multilateral measures and agreements will create a solid basis for preventing armed conflict and strengthening national and regional security, which in turn are integral elements of the modern architecture of a comprehensive and indivisible system of international security. The formulation of a wide-ranging set of confidence-building measures under the aegis of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe

could serve as an efficient model for successful interaction among States with differing approaches and views.

Belarus attaches particular importance to the formulation of bilateral confidence-building measures; we view this as a foreign-policy priority. We have been conducting successful and productive discussions with our neighbours on these and other specific problems of regional security.

The Republic of Belarus welcomed the July 2001 United Nations Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects and the adoption of its final document: the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects. Belarus shares the concerns of the majority of members of the international community, which regard the illicit trade and smuggling of small arms and light weapons as one of the major factors facilitating the proliferation of international terrorism and local armed conflicts. We believe that the illicit proliferation and destabilizing accumulation of small arms and light weapons pose a real threat to regional and international peace and security. In our view, only more efficient national, regional and global measures regulating various aspects of the problem of small arms and light weapons can help break the vicious cycle of problems related to the illicit proliferation and use of small arms and light weapons. The Republic of Belarus will take all necessary steps to implement the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects.

The Republic of Belarus supports the prohibition of the use, stockpiling, production and transfer of anti-personnel landmines. Our country does not produce anti-personnel landmines. In 1995, the Republic of Belarus joined the de facto international moratorium on the export of anti-personnel landmines. That moratorium has been extended by Belarus through the end of 2002.

Lacking the necessary financial and technological resources, the Republic of Belarus at present is not ready to join the 1997 Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on Their Destruction, but has been considering the possibility of joining the Convention in future in the context of possible international financial and technological assistance in demining and in the elimination of stockpiles of anti-personnel landmines. The Republic of Belarus is ready to start cooperation on demining and stockpile elimination activities with all interested parties and welcomes any related proposals and initiatives.

In conclusion, I would like to express our hope that the international community will be able to develop reliable mechanisms to confront new types of risks and threats to our common security.

Mr. Pearson (New Zealand): Let me convey to you, Sir, my congratulations on your assumption of the chairmanship of this important Committee. You have the full support of New Zealand in the pursuit of what we hope will be a productive session.

The appalling atrocities that took place only a few weeks ago in this city and in this country have been roundly condemned. The New Zealand Prime Minister, the Right Honourable Helen Clark, described them as a "a war against civilization". Terrorism in any shape or form will never succeed. We condemn it unequivocally. New Zealand is resolved to work with others in preventing such unspeakable acts and to punish those who are responsible.

In a world which increasingly faces unpredictable and asymmetric threats to international security — whether terrorism, computer hacking or germ warfare — multilateral machinery to confront them is more vital than ever. This makes the work of this Committee even more relevant.

New Zealand has consistently sought to push the disarmament, arms control and non-proliferation agenda forward. We remain determined in this endeavour. However, as we review progress this year, we find ourselves once again with too little to be optimistic about. The inventory of unfinished business in many areas remains far too large.

We have to address this credibility gap if our multilateral structures are to remain relevant in delivering security benefits. No disarmament instrument is yet universal. There is underperformance in compliance and implementation, and once more this year the successes we have secured are offset by some significant setbacks.

The entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) is not in sight; the negotiations to conclude a compliance protocol on biological weapons were inconclusive; we are no further ahead in negotiating a ban on fissile production; the Conference on Disarmament has again failed to

deal with nuclear disarmament; the Chemical Weapons Convention is not universal in all regions; and the START process seems to have come to a halt.

The security landscape is changing before our eyes. Unilateral tendencies are evident, and new strategic bargains are being canvassed. There are calls for a new security framework. A shakeup of institutionalized disarmament diplomacy may be occurring. There may be a risk of power politics pushing others to the margins, which could prompt exactly the wrong response. Those of us who are determined to advance the multilateral agenda find our objectives constantly frustrated.

We have no difficulty in addressing changing realities; on the contrary, New Zealand welcomes the move away from a cold-war mindset. But in the push for change, we must not endanger the gains we have made so far, and we must ensure that what we have got is in working order. Change and consolidation need not be mutually exclusive options.

New Zealand regrets that the negotiations to develop a compliance mechanism for the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC) failed this year to agree on a draft protocol. Evidence of non-compliance with the Convention's prohibitions in the past, or difficulties with the parameters of the subject, should not lead ipso facto to the conclusion that a compliance protocol is of limited value. We should instead focus our attention clearly on the real need: effective compliance machinery that will make it harder for proliferators to cheat or for terrorists to go undetected and unchecked.

Unilateral and plurilateral measures to deal with these types of threats, such as bio-defence programmes, are essential and consistent with the implementation of the Convention. But the bio-warfare threat also requires broad collective responses from all who subscribe to the norm. It is important that we demonstrate leadership to strengthen the Convention's prohibitions.

Squabbling fruitlessly over the past at the next Review Conference of the BWC in November will not take us forward. It should be the time for fresh thinking "outside the box" to address non-compliance concerns in an effective manner. New Zealand continues to believe that measures to strengthen the Convention are possible, and we consider that the Ad Hoc Group's mandate remains valid as a basis for doing this.

We had another conspicuous failure this year in the Conference on Disarmament. It seems to have lost its way and its purpose. The Conference has not adapted to today's world. The group structures that operate within it not only perpetuate the rigidities of another time, but also enable some to take cover from accountability.

The Conference's mandate as the sole forum for negotiations on disarmament has been challenged. The Conference's claim to be multilateral is fundamentally flawed. The assumption that only a limited number of countries are capable of determining global negotiating priorities and outcomes is nonsense. The Conference on Disarmament should be open to all countries who are seeking to engage in disarmament and non-proliferation.

We cannot realistically hold the institution itself as being responsible for its failure, however. Accountability rests with its member Governments, and political realities outside the Conference determine what it can substantively achieve, of course. Yet it is regrettable that its prolonged failure to engage does not seem to cause any real concern in some capitals.

The negotiating options before the Conference on Disarmament have become interlinked, whether we like it or not. Assertions of symmetry in its programme of work have served to cement the deadlock. A new approach to its programme of work — one that does not seek to be so prescriptive in the mandates — should be tested. The priority should be to establish the subsidiary bodies, but to leave it to them to determine what they will address and the modalities of their mandates, whether it be through deliberations or negotiations. There are no risks in this option, since the Conference is already so scrupulous in the exercise of consensus.

We were pleased that the United Nations Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects was successful earlier this year. The Programme of Action is no modest achievement. Unfortunately, there was no agreement to include measures dealing with some aspects of the legal trade of these ubiquitous killers where they impinge on illicit transfers. Prohibiting or restricting supply to non-State actors was also excluded. But it was an important outcome nevertheless. Perhaps most important, it has delivered a framework within which the international community can orient itself and work towards its non-proliferation goals — from the global level right down to the local.

We must be careful that this process does not become an end in itself, however. Closer partnership between Governments and civil society would be a useful corrective to process-driven tendencies and would keep us focused on the task at hand. Reducing the appalling body count inflicted on civilians by military-style weapons must remain uppermost.

The Ottawa mine ban Convention stands out as a uniquely successful humanitarian and disarmament endeavour so far. The process began with more than its fair share of doubters and detractors. But central to its success has been an organic sense of common purpose around which most operational and organizational questions revolve, and are resolved, with a minimum of fuss, by multilateral standards. A tangible sense of purpose has been forged between north and south, between developing and developed, between Governments and non-governmental organizations. It has become a true coalition of the willing.

This is not to say that it lacks significant problems to overcome if it is to be effective over the long term in achieving a mine-free world. At least 50 countries have not yet joined the mine ban Convention. The treaty has still to test its procedures for fact-finding and clarification in cases of possible non-compliance and it will need to remain resolute in addressing longer-term issues of victim assistance and the reintegration into society of mine victims. The can-do dynamic among the Convention's partners, however, is a pertinent reminder to the international community and to pessimists everywhere that leadership in disarmament can be a potent and positive force, and it is also a reminder of the power of collective will.

The first year of this century has continued to witness appalling violations of the laws of war. Many of these have been inflicted in internal conflicts, often by non-State actors, rather than in conventional State-to-State conflict. The Review Conference of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW) in Geneva this December will be the opportunity to tackle this. Before it are proposals to expand the scope of the treaty and its Protocols to internal conflicts. New Zealand is strongly behind them.

The international community must also address the problem of explosive remnants of war. They kill or maim many thousands of people each year. There is scope here for tightening up the restrictions on the use of certain weapons, especially cluster sub-munitions. We need to ensure that they are stringently consistent with the principles of the 1949 Geneva Convention Protocol on the protection of civilians as well as of the CCW itself. And attention needs to be focused on realistic methods of exchange of technical information, warnings to civilians and post-conflict clearance activities on a broad range of unexploded munitions.

Industry-driven improvements to munitions or fusing design, while attractive, will never be enough. Our strong preference is for a legally binding instrument on explosive remnants of war, if necessary after an expert process to explore appropriate modalities, and we want this to be ready for signature before the next CCW Review Conference in 2006. Time is of the essence here.

It has been a challenging year for the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons. Financial and housekeeping problems have, unfortunately, diverted attention from implementation. Despite this, implementation is, on the whole, proceeding well with the treaty's highly professional inspectorate. Verification activities are continuing as best they can under the circumstances. The deadly legacy of chemical facilities needs to dismantled and destroyed as soon as possible to enhance international confidence in the global ban.

As we confront new asymmetrical global threats, the work of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) becomes even more pivotal in underpinning and enhancing international security. The Agency's safeguards are an indispensable component of the nuclear non-proliferation regime and its verification role can only become more central to our efforts to prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons. The safekeeping of radioactive materials, especially those with the potential to be used for nuclear weapons, has never been more important. The possible impact of terrorism on the security of nuclear material is too shocking to contemplate. The work of the IAEA has thus never been of greater importance and New Zealand's support for it is unwavering.

Last year, we had a sense of optimism about the prospects for forward momentum on nuclear disarmament. The new undertakings agreed at the 2000 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) provide the contemporary blueprint for action in a way that ensures international security. Of singular significance

was the unequivocal undertaking to achieve the total elimination of nuclear weapons. Last year, our heads of Government, in endorsing that outcome, were resolved to keep all options open on eliminating weapons of mass destruction.

A year later, it is difficult to identify progress in the implementation of these agreed undertakings on nuclear disarmament. Implementation will take time. New Zealand is realistic about that. We welcome the indications of further cuts that have been given by the United States and the Russian Federation, but when we look for evidence of a wider determination to move forward, it is difficult to find.

The test, as we approach the NPT review cycle next year, will be in delivery and accountability. Moving to the total elimination of nuclear weapons must become operative policy. Presumptions that these weapons can be retained indefinitely are not sustainable, nor are they compatible with the unequivocal undertaking to achieve total elimination. New Zealand and its New Agenda partners are determined to ensure that the NPT undertakings are taken forward. Our Foreign Ministers made this clear earlier this week.

A crucial step along the way is the CTBT. A Conference to promote the entry into force of the CTBT is to be held soon. It is a Conference we wish had not been necessary. We have all invested so much effort over the years in this Treaty. It is deeply disappointing that it has not entered into force five years after it was opened for signature.

The CTBT will contribute to international peace and security in unmistakable ways. By creating an international norm prohibiting all nuclear test explosions in all environments, the Treaty will make a significant contribution towards the prevention of the proliferation of nuclear weapons and provide impetus to the process of the total elimination of these weapons of mass destruction. Ratifying the CTBT is one critically important step that all States could take to underline their commitment to promoting our common security.

Interpretations of strategic stability have come into even sharper focus. Those suggesting that Tuesday 11 September was the day the world changed are correct. At a time when threats to our security are becoming asymmetrical, disarmament and non-proliferation are more, not less relevant and action against non-State entities must be strengthened in States-based frameworks.

Our multilateral machinery has to be in full working order if we are going to deal successfully with these uncertainties and we must not loose sight of our real objective: to deliver on disarmament. Recent events have demonstrated that international security is a collective concern and a collective responsibility. Collective engagement remains absolutely fundamental.

The proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and their delivery systems impacts on all of us ultimately and we all have a stake in international security. In determining strategic stability, we must be careful not to misappropriate it to conceal procrastination on disarmament and non-proliferation. Implementation of the agreed NPT steps on nuclear disarmament should be a major determinant in achieving international security. We believe it is essential at this time to exercise great caution in decisions that could impact negatively on disarmament and non-proliferation endeavours. Change must go hand in hand with consolidation.

Mr. Alemán (Ecuador) (*spoke in Spanish*): Mr. Chairman, I am particularly pleased to congratulate you and the other members of the Bureau on your well-deserved election. Your personal virtues and your great professionalism assure us of success in our work.

Ecuador fully adheres to the statement made by the representative of Chile on behalf of the Rio Group.

The need to maintain international peace and security is not new; from its very beginnings, humankind has struggled to achieve these goals. In the last century, the Hague conferences and the League of Nations made advances in this struggle. But it is the United Nations and its Charter that made the maintenance of international peace and security their fundamental mission.

Conspiring against peace are armed conflicts, whether national or international in nature, in which women and children are the most adversely affected and the greatest victims of conflict's harmful effects. Security, however, is closely related to the political, economic and social conditions existing in States. The scope of the issue of peace and security has broadened to include not only military factors but also non-military factors such as hunger, disease, ignorance, violence and terrorism.

The terrorist attacks of 11 September perpetrated against the United States of America, which my country condemns and deplores, have once more been rejected by the international community and should spur us to a more profound reflection on the threats in today's world to international peace and security, on their origins and destructive capacity, as well as on the measures the United Nations should adopt jointly to achieve its noble aims, in accordance with the purposes and principles enshrined in the Charter.

The work of the First Committee, essentially dedicated to the study of issues related to disarmament and international security, must make a substantial contribution in dealing adequately with the delicate current situation. The fight against all forms of terrorism is directly linked, among other issues, to nuclear disarmament, non-proliferation, arms control and the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons. All of these issues are part of our agenda.

In this forum, Ecuador has been a permanent advocate of the need to respect and strengthen multilateral agreements on the eradication, reduction and limitation of armaments.

At every opportunity, Ecuador has reaffirmed its commitment to the cause of disarmament. That is why Ecuador has been part of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons from its beginning and actively participated in the creation of the Treaty of Tlatelolco, which declared all of Latin America to be a nuclear-weapon-free zone. This past August, Ecuador assumed the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva. My country's leadership in this honourable post will be oriented by the unwavering principles of its foreign policy on the subject. Despite the paralysed state of the activities of that important body, the snares can be overcome if there exists the political will to make progress.

Disarmament and the prevention of conflicts are two sides of the same problem. If possible conflicts are resolved in time by pacific means, the States involved have no reason to embark on an arms race. As well, disarmament becomes easier when solutions come through dialogue, the necessary negotiations and agreements, as well as through the adoption of confidence-building measures.

At the start of the twenty-first century, we must not encourage a new arms race, whose risks for international security are obvious, and whose cost would be offensive to nations fighting for the eradication of extreme poverty and the development of their peoples. A resumption of nuclear testing would leave the door open for other nuclear-weapon States and States so aspiring to follow that example and end the process of disarmament and the non-proliferation regime, which was constructed over long years of patient negotiations.

As I indicated earlier, today, threats to international security are of a very different nature. Protracted conflicts without hope of a just and lasting solution, extreme poverty, terrorism, drug trafficking and transnational crime must be dealt with through all legal means and international cooperation. Growing development and the well-being of peoples, democracy and the great values of humanity must have real meaning for the vast majority of people, who live in poverty. Social justice, respect for human rights and better opportunities of employment and production in the developing world will decisively contribute to the genuine strengthening of international security, stability and the consolidation of democracy and its fundamental freedoms.

The illicit trade in small arms and light weapons is directly linked to social, economic and humanitarian problems caused by the domestic civil confrontations and international conflicts, as well as by the ruthless action of organized crime, especially that of terrorism and drug traffickers. The implementation of the Programme of Action resulting from the Conference on small arms and light weapons held last July in New York would undoubtedly be a positive step in the process of strengthening domestic and international security.

On the subject of anti-personnel mines, I want to express our satisfaction that Ecuador has complied with the obligations contracted in the Ottawa Convention and has achieved the proposed goal of possessing no stockpiled mines by the time of the convening of the third meeting of States parties to the Convention, held recently in Managua. In the first stage and by its own efforts, Ecuador destroyed 101,458 anti-personnel mines by August of this year and on 11 September, proceeded to destroy an additional total of 154,344 mines, thanks to foreign assistance channelled through the Organization of American States.

The central goal of general and complete disarmament under effective international control is still far from having been achieved. Huge arsenals of

nuclear weapons still exist, despite the fact that in 1996 the International Court of Justice issued its Advisory Opinion that the threat or use of nuclear weapons was unlawful and that there was an obligation to negotiate their complete elimination — an obligation acknowledged by the States parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) at the 2000 NPT Review Conference.

We are witnessing new approaches to strategic defence doctrines, as well as the updating of such doctrines, which in and of itself increases international insecurity. Furthermore, it has not been possible to reach consensus on the draft protocol to the Biological Weapons Convention. The States that must become parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty have still not done so. Disarmament should concern all countries, and not simply those that have already disarmed.

For the United Nations and all its Member States, it is therefore crucial to continue the campaign to stop the arms race in all its aspects, promote a genuine disarmament process on the basis of international agreement, increase confidence between States and ease international tension.

Mr. Orlando Requeijo (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): I should like first of all to congratulate you, Sir, on your election to the chairmanship and to assure you of the full support of the delegation of Cuba. I also congratulate the other members of the Bureau and take this opportunity to request the delegation of Myanmar to convey to Ambassador Mya Than our gratitude for his excellent work last year.

The work of our Committee, and of the fifty-sixth session in general, has begun under very unusual circumstances. The upheaval caused by the terrorist attacks of 11 September has had an impact on all of us. Cuba reiterates its absolute condemnation of such acts, and reaffirms its solidarity with the people of the United States. At the same time, we are convinced that military action cannot provide a solution to this very grave problem. On the contrary, the bombing of Afghanistan by the United States will lead only to a cycle of violence and result in the deaths of an incalculable number of innocent victims, as is now becoming evident.

In order to combat terrorism, we must undertake an international cooperation effort under the leadership of the United Nations, not engage in war. In response to a request from the Secretary-General, on 4 October the National Assembly of People's Power of Cuba decided to ratify our country's accession to the 12 existing international conventions on terrorism. As the Secretary-General has said, only the United Nations can give global legitimacy to the long-term fight against terrorism.

Many of those who were most optimistic 10 years ago, when it was fashionable to say that the cold war had come to an end, cannot now hide their scepticism. We are still a long way from the global peace, stability and cooperation that was expected to materialize after the supposed end of the cold war. The emergence of a unipolar world, in which only one super-Power has the military capacity to enable it to dominate the international scene, has not brought greater security for most of us — quite the opposite.

Instead of more resources being devoted to development, military spending is rising quickly again. No one could deny that, with only a part of the almost $80 billion spent annually on the military, we could meet the needs of the more than 1.3 billion people who live in extreme poverty.

The problems of underdevelopment, hunger and disease, among others, which affect the vast majority of the countries of the world, cannot be solved with bombs. Of course, we must control small arms and light weapons so as to avoid the terrible humanitarian consequences of their unbridled proliferation. No one opposes the prohibition of the indiscriminate and irresponsible use of anti-personnel landmines. At the same time, however, we wonder when real steps will be taken to prevent some countries from continuing to develop and use arms that are becoming increasingly deadly and sophisticated. Such weapons are not much discussed, and are almost never referred to in the resolutions that we approve every year, yet they are the weapons that cause the so-called collateral damage — a term devised to obscure the fact that death and injury are being inflicted on innocent people. When will we adopt an international agreement to eliminate nuclear weapons from the face of the earth?

It is strange that some question the fact that achieving nuclear disarmament should be an absolute priority task, at a time when more than 30,000 nuclear weapons are still in existence, endangering the very existence of humankind.

Despite the fact that the outcome of the Sixth Review Conference of the States Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) prompted some to believe at the time that the most important result had been achieved, in reality it is clear that that was not the case. Time goes by without any concrete action being taken to fulfil the commitment of moving towards nuclear disarmament. Indeed, the contrary is true: we have witnessed actions that completely go against the obligations assumed.

For many countries, including Cuba, multilateralism is of fundamental importance, and must be preserved. We are concerned about the anti-multilateral tendency in the area of disarmament and arms control that has been demonstrated by the new Administration of the major military Power, as evidenced by the positions it has taken on the negotiations on the protocol to strengthen the Biological Weapons Convention, on the anti-ballistic missile Treaty, on the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty and on negotiations on the Programme of Action adopted at the United Nations Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects, among others.

Apart from constituting a flagrant violation of the anti-ballistic missile Treaty, the establishment of a national missile defence system would restart the arms race, including in outer space.

We must establish a universal and non-discriminatory multilateral regime in the area of missile proliferation. The solution cannot be found in control regimes that basically meet the interests of one group of countries. The work of the Group of Experts on the issue of missiles is an important starting point, and will make it possible for Member States to review these issues in depth and with the objectivity necessary, so that together we can take the required decisions.

As is well known, the work carried out for more than six years by the Ad Hoc Group of Governmental Experts on the Biological Weapons Convention was interrupted when, during its twenty-fourth session, the delegation of the United States — one of the depositary States — announced that it did not want to continue negotiations on the text presented by the Chairman of the Group, or even on an amended text. While reaffirming the validity of the mandate of the Ad Hoc Group, Cuba would like to stress that what we have achieved after many years of work cannot simply be cast aside, and that the only way to strengthen the Convention is through multilateral, non-discriminatory negotiations.

Cuba welcomes the recent adoption of the Agreement concerning relations between the United Nations and the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, and we hope that this will contribute positively to the full implementation of that Convention.

Since we consider it more relevant than ever, we hope that after many years of waiting we will be able to take a final decision during the current session on the convening of a fourth special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament, in which we could evaluate the implementation of the agreements adopted by the Assembly in 1978.

For some time this year our country chaired the work of the Conference on Disarmament. The intensive and extensive consultations with members of this body during our mandate allowed us to see firsthand the broad interests of States in maintaining it as the only multilateral negotiation forum in the area of disarmament, despite the difficulties that it has been experiencing. It is therefore disturbing that the Conference on Disarmament cannot make progress on priority issues such as nuclear disarmament and the prevention of the arms race in outer space, due to the intransigent positions of some countries.

If we continue to extend these sessions without substantive progress in the work of the Conference on Disarmament, the credibility of this body could be seriously affected. It would only serve the interests of those who prefer to act outside the Conference, avoiding the rest of the international community.

We welcome the adoption of the Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons, which we consider an important achievement. At the same time, we cannot overlook the fact that the Programme has major limitations. It is unfortunate that, due to the inflexible position adopted by one delegation, responding to its own narrow national interests, the Programme could not make even a minimal reference to questions of key importance, such as those related to the unrestricted trade in and possession of small arms and light weapons and the need for these arms to be provided only to Governments or entities authorized by them.

Our country will comply strictly with the commitments assumed in the Programme of Action,

and we hope that the First Committee can adopt a consensus resolution on this very important topic. We take this opportunity to congratulate Ambassadors Carlos dos Santos of Mozambique and Camillo Reyes of Colombia on their work in the Preparatory Conference and in the Conference itself respectively.

I would like to conclude, Mr. Chairman, by repeating that you can always count on the support of the Cuban delegation, and we wish you every success in your work.

Mr. Nene (South Africa): Please accept my delegation's congratulations, Sir, on your assumption of the Chair of the First Committee during the General Assembly's fifty-sixth session. I assure you of my delegation's full support and cooperation as you and your Bureau lead the work of this Committee to a successful conclusion.

South Africa has unreservedly denounced the senseless and horrific terrorist attacks in the United States on 11 September and shares in the pain and grief of the loved ones of those who lost their lives in the attacks. South Africa is confident that the perpetrators of these dastardly attacks will be brought to justice.

In our statement to this Committee last year we commented on the deepening crisis in international relations, non-proliferation, disarmament and arms control, and on the inability of some multilateral forums to substantively address some of the most central issues of our day. Much of that has remained unchanged. In this context, we reiterate our firm belief that international peace and security require the participation of the entire international community. Multilateral engagement and partnership are essential. While some opportunities to advance and finalize some of our efforts during 2001 have again been lost, some valuable progress has been made, notably concerning conventional weapons.

The consensual outcome of the 2000 Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) Review Conference had given us some hope that the Conference on Disarmament could this year eventually untangle its deadlock and permit substantive work on a fissile materials treaty and on nuclear disarmament. This has not been the case. Moreover, it is difficult at this stage to discern advances in the "13 Steps" on nuclear disarmament that NPT States parties agreed to, and there are worrying signs of rollback on certain issues by nuclear-weapon States. South Africa is firm in its view that the undertakings that were given at the NPT Review Conference and the obligations that flow from them must be respected and fulfilled.

The indication of willingness on the part of the United States and the Russian Federation to reduce their nuclear arsenals to lower limits is welcomed, but concern exists regarding the linkage that has been established with the abrogation of the Treaty on the Limitation of Anti-Ballistic Missile Systems (ABM Treaty). The ABM Treaty remains important in the maintenance and promotion of strategic stability and as a basis for further reduction of strategic offensive weapons. Grave consequences for the future of global security may result from abrogation of the Treaty. States must refrain from any steps that could lead to a nuclear arms race or undermine the international community's determination to prevent nuclear weapons proliferation.

The consensus outcome of the United Nations Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects cannot be underestimated. South Africa is pleased that Africa's leadership role ensured that the Conference successfully adopted a realistic and implementable Programme of Action. While we recognize that the Programme of Action is a delicate balance of differing views, it does for the first time provide an internationally agreed comprehensive and achievable framework to prevent, combat and eradicate the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons in all its aspects, based on the approach adopted by affected States. South Africa is satisfied that the Conference achieved its goals, and looks forward to intensified international cooperation in realizing the stated objectives and measures in the Programme of Action.

The Conference could not, however, agree on the need to establish and maintain controls over private ownership of small arms and the need to prevent sales of small arms and light weapons to non-State actors. These issues remain of great concern to South Africa, and we continue to believe that they should be addressed — nationally, regionally and on a global level. We therefore call on all States to implement measures to ensure that the supply of small arms and light weapons is limited only to Governments or to entities duly authorized by Governments and to implement legal restrictions on the unrestricted trade in and ownership of small arms and light weapons.

South Africa will jointly, with Colombia and Japan, submit a draft resolution on the illicit trade in

small arms and light weapons in all its aspects that captures the achievements of the Conference, in particular the recommendations contained in the Programme of Action. The draft resolution also consolidates and replaces the previous South African and Japanese resolutions related to the issue of small arms.

Another success was the recent Third Meeting of States Parties to the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on Their Destruction, held in Nicaragua. The Anti-personnel Mine-Ban Convention continues to set new standards in disarmament; 120 States have ratified or acceded to the Convention in less than four years, and this is a record-breaking achievement. Stockpiles of anti-personnel mines are swiftly being eradicated; mine-victim casualties are decreasing, while funding for mine-action programmes is being sustained. Moreover, the international norm established by the Convention is having a global impact, as trade has almost disappeared and production declined dramatically.

The inclusive nature of the partnership between Governments and civil society in the creation of the Convention has been maintained and reinforced through the inter-sessional programme of work and its mechanisms. This work will now be assisted by the decision to establish an implementation support unit that will be of tremendous benefit to mine-affected developing countries, as well as other countries with small or inexperienced staff. Moreover, the unit will provide a central documentation and reference home for all activities related to the Convention, thereby preserving institutional knowledge and providing a sustainable backbone to the implementation process.

Recent events underline the threat that both biological and chemical weapons pose to modern society. It would, however, be an understatement to say that South Africa was disappointed by the outcome of the Biological Weapons Convention Ad Hoc Group negotiations for a protocol to strengthen the implementation of the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC). The threat of disease being used as weapons of war and terror remains an issue of concern for South Africa, as does the need to combat disease and its debilitating impact on the socio-economic development of countries around the world, and especially in Africa. Our commitment during the negotiations was therefore to ensure that the implementation of the BWC and our common goal of preventing the threat posed by biological weapons are strengthened.

It is necessary that the international community as a whole take action to commit itself to strengthening the norm against the development, production, stockpiling and use of these reprehensible weapons. South Africa continues to see this as a core element of the international security architecture, and we remain convinced that this objective would be possible. The concerns that were expressed at the July-August meeting of the BWC Ad Hoc Group can still be addressed in a satisfactory manner.

The progress being made in the context of the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC), including its universalization, is welcomed. We also note the progress made by all of the possessor States with regard to the destruction of chemical weapons, in particular those that have achieved or have exceeded the levels of destruction laid down by the Convention. We are also encouraged by the renewed vigour of the destruction programme of the Russian Federation. We are hopeful that with the assistance of States parties in a position to do so, the Russian Federation will achieve all its future destruction deadlines as set forth in the Convention.

My Government's concerns regarding weapons of mass destruction also relate to systems and technology that could be used to deliver these weapons. It is for this reason that South Africa supported the resolution on missiles, adopted at the fifty-fifth session of the General Assembly, that led to the establishment of a panel of governmental experts to consider the issue of missiles in all its aspects. South Africa remains convinced that the proliferation of capabilities to develop missiles able to deliver weapons of mass destruction can only be effectively addressed through a multilateral process that would allow for active and substantive participation by all States.

South Africa attaches importance to the role of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW) as an instrument of international humanitarian law. South Africa believes that a renewed focus should be placed on the CCW Convention as a viable instrument which could proactively address various conventional weapons deemed to be excessively injurious or to have indiscriminate effects. South Africa views it as important that the Convention's Review Conference address issues that would improve

the effective implementation of the Convention rather than reopening the existing Protocols.

South Africa would like to see an extension of the scope of application of the Convention to be in conformity with Amended Protocol II. Furthermore, the Amended Protocol's compliance mechanism, based on the principle of consultation, clarification and cooperation, should be made applicable to the Convention and its annexed Protocols. South Africa acknowledges the humanitarian concerns related to the use of mines other than anti-personnel mines and would like to see a process being launched by the Review Conference to consider a comprehensive instrument on such mines that would include issues related to detectability, self-destruction and sensitive fusing mechanisms. In addition, we support a process to urgently consider and develop an additional Protocol to deal with the explosive remnants of war.

The inability of the Conference on Disarmament over the past years to undertake substantive work, the fact that the majority of First Committee resolutions do not enjoy the support of all Member States and that the work of the Disarmament Commission is often ignored are reasons for concern. Part of the problem is that these disarmament mechanisms were created 23 years ago and they do not reflect today's realities. Our institutions and mechanisms, their membership, financial implications and methods of work are in need of serious re-evaluation and overhaul.

Lack of progress regarding the early entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) is yet another cause of concern for my delegation. In this regard, my delegation would reiterate the emphasis that was placed by the 2000 NPT Review Conference on

> "The importance and urgency of signatures and ratifications, without delay and without conditions and in accordance with constitutional processes, to achieve the early entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty". (*NPT/CONF.2000/28 (Parts I and II), p. 14*)

We appeal to Member States that have not yet done so to sign and ratify the Treaty, as soon as possible, particularly those States identified in the Treaty's Annex II. The cessation of all nuclear-weapon-test explosions or any other nuclear explosion will contribute to the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons in all its aspects, to the process of nuclear disarmament leading to the complete elimination of nuclear weapons and, therefore, to the enhancement of international peace and security. We will be participating in the article XIV Conference of the CTBT that is to be held later this year and will work to ensure that the Conference achieves its objective of promoting the early entry into force of the Treaty.

South Africa remains committed to working in this Committee and in all other disarmament and non-proliferation forums so as to achieve the total elimination of all weapons of mass destruction and their delivery systems and to limit the numbers of conventional weapons to the minimum required for self-defence.

Mr. Bakhit (Sudan) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to join those who have preceded me in congratulating you, Sir, on your assumption of the chairmanship of the First Committee this year. We would also like to congratulate the members of the Bureau on their election. We are confident that your rich experience in the field of disarmament will lead this Committee to the desired results. We would also like to take this opportunity to commend your predecessor, Ambassador Mya Than, for his successful chairmanship of the Committee last year. I would also like to commend the introductory statement made by the Under-Secretary-General for Disarmament Affairs and his efforts to achieve disarmament and to promote the role of the Department in this respect.

The First Committee meets this year amidst serious developments and challenges in the field of international security, disarmament and arms control. The criminal terrorist act on 11 September, which took the lives of thousands of innocent people, makes it incumbent upon us, as an international community, to promote collective diplomatic work to combat international terrorism in all its forms and manifestations. It also requires that we make more international efforts to achieve disarmament, especially nuclear disarmament, and the elimination of weapons of mass destruction. This is especially so given that such weapons falling into the hands of terrorists would have disastrous consequences for international peace and security. Once again, our delegation reiterates its full condemnation of this heinous act and offers its condolences to the American Government and people and to the bereaved families.

We believe that the international community should make efforts to root out the threats to

international peace and security, and it should focus on the priorities concerning nuclear disarmament, weapons of mass destruction and conventional weapons. These are the priorities set out in the Final Document of the special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament in 1978. It reaffirmed that the highest priority should be given to nuclear disarmament, weapons of mass destruction and then to conventional weapons. The Millennium Declaration also emphasized the endeavours to eliminate weapons of mass destruction, especially nuclear weapons, thus strengthening this approach.

Sudan deems it important to promptly hold an international conference to eliminate nuclear weapons. We also support the convening of the fourth special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament. Here, we express once again our concern over the failure to reach consensus in the deliberations of the Disarmament Commission on the agenda and objectives of this session.

We are keenly interested in what was mentioned by the Under-Secretary-General in his introductory statement before this Committee. He alerted us to the serious fact that global military spending is steadily growing, reaching $800 billion last year. This was also reflected in the reports of the United Nations and of international financial institutions. This comes, of course, at the expense of economic and social development in many developing countries, especially the least developed countries, which look to international assistance to eradicate poverty and backwardness and to achieve sustainable development and contribute to bridging the gap between developed and developing countries.

The Sudan welcomes the conclusions of the United Nations Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons held last July. The draft Programme of Action on the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons — through various measures on the national, regional and international levels, and the follow-up mechanisms — has established a solid basis for the international community and is a first step towards fighting the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons. The implementation of the Programme requires intensive efforts on the part of Member States of the United Nations and other interested regional and international organizations by taking constructive steps to achieve the results and objectives provided for in that Programme.

Our delegation, in this respect, would like to reiterate anew its regret, because the Programme of Action does not contain any clear commitment by Member States to export weapons to Governments only — something that was advocated by my country at the July Conference, as well as by all African countries, because they are among those most affected by the proliferation of small arms and light weapons in the hands of terrorist groups that threaten peace and security on the continent. Sudan believes that the failure to include this in the document is a clear gap that might open the way towards illicit proliferation of these weapons in Africa, which suffers from conflicts and in which terrorist rebel movements play a destabilizing role.

As one of the African countries affected by landmines, Sudan supports all international efforts to eliminate them because of the threat to civilians. Sudan was one of the first countries to sign the Ottawa Convention and has participated in the review conferences, especially the one in Managua last year. Sudan reiterates its commitment to the letter and spirit of the Convention, and in this respect, we hope that all countries that are signatories of the Convention will be treated equally when it comes to assistance to clear mines and rehabilitate victims, and that certain geographical areas are not concentrated on to the exclusion of others.

The establishment of nuclear-weapon-free zones in different parts of the world promotes international peace and security. In this respect, Sudan joined in African efforts that led to the conclusion of the Treaty of Pelindaba. Sudan supports efforts to establish a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East. The international community is also called upon to bring pressure to bear on Israel to join the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), especially given that this was expressed by States parties to the NPT during the sixth review conference, in 2000. The Final Document of that conference emphasized the need for Israel to accede to NPT under the comprehensive safeguards system.

We share the keen interest of the international community on transparency in the field of armament as one of the means to promote international peace and security. But we emphasize at the same time that United Nations Register of Conventional Arms still lacks the necessary transparency. It should be expanded to include weapons of mass destruction. The Register

also does not take into account the serious situation in the Middle East, where Israel is continuing to expand its arsenal of modern weapons, which are used in front of the whole world against innocent, unarmed civilians in Palestine, including women and children.

We are not members of the Conference on Disarmament. However, we follow with keen interest what is happening in this unique, deliberative forum for disarmament. We regret the continued failure of the Conference to agree on its agenda. We emphasize anew the importance of the commitment of Member States, especially the five nuclear-weapon States, to enter into serious negotiations to eliminate nuclear weapons.

In conclusion, we reiterate the willingness of Sudan to cooperate with you in order to attain consensus on the agenda before you in a way that will serve the interests and purposes of disarmament.

Mr. Alcalay (Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): Allow me, Sir, once again to reiterate the most enthusiastic congratulations of my delegation on seeing you preside over the work of this Committee, as we said when you were elected. As Vice-Chairman, I would also like to reiterate my fullest willingness to contribute to the success of our work under your leadership, especially in this time when historic circumstances, which cloud the prospects for international peace and security, make this Committee an extremely important and relevant forum for continuing of our actions.

My delegation fully associates itself with the statement made by the delegation of Chile, which, speaking on behalf of the Rio Group, set out the position of our region. Nevertheless, I would like to take this opportunity to present the position of the Government of Venezuela and to underscore basic aspects of the work that we shall do during the deliberations of the First Committee.

I would like to begin by saying that the events of 11 September have moved the international community. As other countries have done, my country has categorically condemned the terrorist acts against New York, Washington and Pennsylvania — acts that have shaken global foundations. In that regard, we have expressed our condolences to, and solidarity with, the Government of the United States of America and the families of the victims. We condemn acts such as the ones that took place on that tragic day, which we consider to be attacks against all the peoples of the world. Venezuela itself was also affected, as several of our citizens were victims of the attack on the Twin Towers.

Just as the eyes of the world have been fixed on those deplorable events, so too will the attention of the international community be fixed on the results of the work to be achieved by the First Committee. The Committee of which we are a part will have the task of bringing about and supporting peace, disarmament and international security in these turbulent times. Today more than ever, we must act firmly and join all of our efforts to find peaceful ways and means to end international conflicts, to deal with the threat posed by the use of weapons of mass destruction and to enforce international law and to prevent the violation of its most basic norms. Our objective in this area should be to succeed in steering the United Nations towards the promotion of an approach based on international cooperation that leads to the prevention of conflicts and to an improved ability to respond to the humanitarian emergencies that stem from them.

My delegation believes that security is a subject that is not linked to international peace and security alone, but encompasses a series of elements within a multisectoral framework that, in addition to security, includes the commitment to promote democracy and full respect for human rights, to battle crime and illicit drugs, and to foster overall social and economic development in a harmonious way. With respect to the Committee's agenda, we note with concern that, on the issue of disarmament and arms control, there is not always the political will — or the ability — to comply with the obligations we have assumed in international treaties and agreements. This is one of our most significant challenges: meeting the commitments made by States in the resolutions we adopt.

Venezuela enshrined disarmament in the preamble to its 1999 Constitution as one of the basic principles of its foreign policy. The President of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Mr. Hugo Chávez Frías, attaches particular importance to this issue in various international forums. Just yesterday, in a statement to the United Nations at the Palace of Nations in Geneva, he reiterated his proposal, made in other United Nations forums, that defence spending be reduced by 50 per cent so that the resources freed up as a result may be used to promote social development.

Transparency in military spending is also a goal of my country, and we are gradually achieving it in

order to comply with resolution 54/43, which calls for the gathering of objective information on military issues, including transparency in spending and in the Register of Conventional Arms.

My country favours the establishment of nuclear-weapon-free zones in the various regions of the world, on the basis of agreements freely entered into among the members of a region and of the commitments made in each region. Venezuela supports the convening of an international conference on reducing the nuclear danger, an initiative aimed at identifying ways and means of achieving the elimination of nuclear weapons in the near future, as agreed in the Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT). This would be a contribution to the establishment of confidence-building weapons.

With regard to the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT), I wish to state that my Government is taking the necessary steps to ratify that instrument. The delay in doing so is due primarily to the process of reform and structural change going on in our country. This is nevertheless one of the foreign policy priorities of my country and of our legislative assembly.

We also support the elaboration of a binding legal instrument through which military Powers would commit themselves unequivocally not to use or threaten to use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear-weapon States parties to the NPT. As a full party to the Treaty of Tlatelolco and its protocols, my country supports guarantees on the non-use of nuclear weapons against the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean.

We also have on the agenda of the First Committee the extremely important topic of the illicit trafficking in small arms and light weapons, which intensifies conflicts between States and threatens collective and individual security within our countries. We must address this issue as a shared responsibility, on the basis of international cooperation in order to adopt measures to eradicate this illicit activity. In this connection, we support the agreements reached at the United Nations Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects, which took place last July.

With regard to anti-personnel landmines, Venezuela is very pleased to see the progress that has been made on the implementation of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on Their Destruction. My country has shown its commitment to the objectives of the Convention by taking part in the demining process being carried out in Central American countries, which has yielded major benefits for the inhabitants of formerly mined areas. Venezuela is participating with military experts in these types of activities, as well as in the training programmes being carried out in various countries, including the seminar on mine destruction that took place in Argentina in November 2000.

We wish to point out that mines that have not been removed continue to be a daily menace in countries that have experienced periods of conflict, and to reiterate our concern about zones where mines are still used as combat weapons, in the hope that we will be able to ban them completely. My country believes that financial contributions are key to carrying out demining programmes in various parts of the world, especially in our region, where we think it is important to highlight the financing activities being carried out by countries parties to the Convention, international organizations and non-governmental organizations. These activities require ever-greater technical, financial and human resources, which the international community should support generously.

My country believes that the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production and Stockpiling of Bacteriological (Biological) and Toxin Weapons and on their Destruction should be strengthened by appropriate measures to establish a multilateral verification system, something that has been delayed for many years. It is more important today than ever before to try to completely eradicate the threat to all mankind presented by these terrible weapons.

My country reiterates its unambiguous position on this matter and once again calls on world leaders to implement the principles set out in the Millennium Declaration. As I said earlier, my Government believes that defence spending should be reduced and the proceeds invested in human capital — education, housing, health, employment, the environment and justice — especially in the world's poorest countries. If these problems are not resolved through the commitments adopted by the world's heads of State or Government, they could give rise to conflicts and inequities that could have international ramifications. To resolve them, our only

path is through respect for commitments. Otherwise, violence and other evils could cause grave situations throughout the world. For that reason, the Committee also has the responsibility to adopt measures against such threats to security, with a view to contributing to peace and harmony among nations.

Our goal should be to lay the foundations of a safer, more peaceful and more prosperous world for all mankind, and for future generations. My delegation reaffirms that it will fully cooperate in attaining the Committee's objectives for the fifty-sixth session of the General Assembly. We reiterate our hope that, in this new millennium, we will be able to build a world of peace and solidarity.

Mr. Faessler (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): I wish at the outset to congratulate you, Sir, on your election to the chairmanship of the First Committee and to wish you every success in your endeavours. I assure you of the full support of my delegation so that the Committee's work will be crowned with success, especially in these difficult times. I would like also to congratulate your country on its major commitment to non-proliferation, arms control and disarmament. My congratulations go also to the other members of the Bureau. I cannot fail to thank the previous Chairman for his commitment, and Mr. Dhanapala and his Secretariat team for their support for the work of the Committee.

The terrorist attacks of 11 September, which struck at the heart of the United States but which were in fact directed against the universal values of justice, freedom and democracy, showed the fragility of international peace and security. My Government condemned those acts of violence, and my entire country joined in demonstrations of sadness and sympathy with the victims. Today, I reiterate those feelings to the Government and the people of the United States. International solidarity, dialogue and determination must guide our efforts to restore justice and eradicate the scourge of international terrorism. My country is ready fully to support those efforts.

Last month's terrorist attacks showed that the environment of international peace and security has changed in recent years. Traditional international conflicts have been supplemented, if not replaced, by internal conflicts in which non-State actors play an increasing role. In addition to terrorism, other significant developments include the proliferation of organized crime, computer crime, et cetera. In this new environment, it is urgent to revisit the international order and to find new and credible solutions in order to ensure world peace and security, while remaining aware that the task ahead will be long and arduous.

This applies also to the more traditional but nevertheless relevant tasks of the First Committee: non-proliferation efforts, arms control and disarmament, relating both to weapons of mass destruction and to conventional weapons. In recent times, there has been little progress in those areas. The central question is: what are the possible contributions that non-proliferation, arms control and disarmament can make to the fight against new threats such as international terrorism? In the view of my Government, it is especially necessary to undertake effective and substantial multilateral efforts, to consolidate existing instruments against the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and to set up universally verifiable and transparent arms control and disarmament regimes. Such regimes, inter alia, prevent weapons of mass destruction and technological knowledge relating to them from falling into the wrong hands. We must also counter efforts to vitiate arms control and disarmament agreements and be more forceful in reminding recalcitrant States of their obligations.

More concretely, and more specifically related to the Committee's work, we call on all States which have not yet done so to ratify, as soon as possible and unconditionally, all arms control and disarmament agreements open to them. I particularly call on those countries that have not yet done so to ratify the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT).

For the third consecutive year, the Conference on Disarmament ended its annual session without having been able to conduct substantive negotiations. Despite the extremely commendable efforts of several Presidents of the Conference, it has not been possible to agree on a programme of work, even though the laudable efforts of the three Special Coordinators on procedural issues leave room for some hope that substantive work can be resumed. The Conference on Disarmament is the sole multilateral forum for arms control and disarmament negotiations. It must play a role in the context of the new challenges to international peace and security. A significant step in that direction was the resumption of negotiations on a ban on the production of fissile materials for military purposes and on international inspection of fissile material production facilities and stocks; these would

prevent such materials from being used for improper purposes.

With regard to the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on Their Destruction (CWC), Switzerland is delighted with the progress made since the Convention's entry into force and is confident that the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, located at The Hague, will be able to continue its work without fetters. My country has engaged in more effective implementation of the Convention. Nevertheless, significant challenges remain. First of all, the elimination of chemical weapons cannot be achieved until all States of the international community have ratified the Convention; I thus call on all States that have not yet ratified the Convention to do so as soon as possible. Moreover, existing stocks of chemical weapons constitute not only a continued danger to the environment and to populations, but also a possible source of supply for, inter alia, terrorist groups. For those reasons among others, my Government is planning to enhance significantly its contribution to the destruction of stockpiled chemical weapons in Russia. Moreover, in the framework of the CWC, Switzerland has placed at the disposal of threatened populations protective equipment and mobile analytical laboratories in the event of chemical incidents.

After six years of diplomatic and scientific efforts under the able guidance of Ambassador Toth of Hungary, negotiations at Geneva, in the Ad Hoc Group of the States Parties to the Biological Weapons Convention, aiming to conclude a protocol on strengthening the Convention, reached a deadlock last summer. The threat of biological weapons, including that of bioterrorism, is today more than ever a key problem for international security.

We must use all means, including multilateral instruments such as the verification protocol, to reduce and eliminate this threat, whatever its origin and at every level. This must be a joint effort made by all key players. The goal of these efforts would not only be to reinforce the prohibition and total elimination of biological weapons, but also to prevent such weapons from falling, as in the case of chemical and nuclear weapons, into the hands of terrorist groups. The Fifth Review Conference of the States parties to the Convention, which is to be held at the end of the year in Geneva, will be forward-looking and should provide an opportunity to strengthen these efforts, in particular by confirming the current mandate of the negotiations.

In July of this year the United Nations Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects took place in New York. We welcome the Programme of Action adopted by that Conference, which, we believe, has to be regarded as the beginning of a process. My country endeavoured to make a substantive contribution to that Conference; together with France, we launched an initiative on the tracing, marking and record-keeping of small arms and light weapons.

The Programme of Action recognized the importance of this question and recommended that a study be undertaken in order to evaluate the possibility of elaborating an international instrument on the matter. This important step encourages us to continue our initiative. We are also delighted at the interest shown in the first edition of the *Small Arms Survey*. The second edition of this yearbook is currently in the preparatory stage. Its purpose is to provide reliable information and analysis on all aspects of the problem of small arms and light weapons, whose deadly effects on a daily basis are well known.

The Third Meeting of States Parties to the anti-personnel mine ban Convention was held in Managua from 18 to 21 September. This Conference contributed to further progress being made with respect to the universality and the implementation of the Convention. My country is grateful to the Government for Nicaragua for the excellent way in which the Conference was organized, which helped us to better understand the problems relating to the elimination of these weapons in Latin America.

The flexible and innovative institutional mechanism set up under this Convention ensures effective international cooperation in the field of mine action. In this context, my country welcomes the decision taken at Managua to create an implementation support unit within the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining. Its purpose is to support, on the substantive as well as the logistical level, the inter-sessional process.

There are two other areas to which we attach considerable importance in the field of anti-personnel landmines. The first is assistance to victims. In this area, my country, in cooperation with the International Committee of the Red Cross, the World Health

Organization and the United Nations Children's Fund in particular, has been developing a strategic concept. The second is the destruction of stocks of anti-personnel mines. Switzerland is honoured to have been elected as co-Rapporteur for the Standing Committee dealing with this matter.

The Review Conference of the 1981 Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW) will take place at the end of the year in Geneva. It will provide an opportunity to evaluate the implementation of the Convention and of its Protocols as well as to consider and evaluate means to still further reduce excessive injury or indiscriminate effects relating to the use of certain conventional weapons. Switzerland is pleased with the progress accomplished in recent months under the able guidance of the President-designate, Ambassador Luck of Australia, and the friends of the President. This progress provides us with the prospect of a more sustained process in the future. I will come back to this item during the thematic debate.

In conclusion, let me say that I venture to hope that the events of 11 September, far from marking a retreat, will indeed breathe new life into our work, thus helping to promote and to ensure international peace and security, within the framework of a multilateral process that, while undoubtedly imperfect, has proved reliable.

Mr. Atieh (Syrian Arab Republic) *(spoke in Arabic)*: Sir, I should like to express our pleasure at your election to the chairmanship of this Committee. I should like also to congratulate the members of the Bureau on their election. We are convinced that thanks to your vast experience and skill, the work of this Committee will be successful and constructive.

I should like also to express my thanks to Mr. Dhanapala, Under-Secretary-General in charge of disarmament, for the efforts he has been making to carry out the tasks entrusted to him by this Committee.

Last year's Millennium Declaration stressed the fact that we cannot accept the manufacture or stockpiling of nuclear weapons and of other weapons of mass destruction or the threat of use, for any reason, of these weapons. As a result, we must work tirelessly to eliminate them through a commitment by all States Members of the United Nations to respect that Declaration.

This Committee should make diligent efforts not to accept double standards or to allow the fate of peoples to be manipulated through the use of a certain kind of terminology.

At a time when some are denying peoples the right to defend their dignity, their land and their right to self-determination, others are allowed to acquire all types of weapons and to use small and light weapons. In addition, all kinds of weapons are provided to the aggressor, and the doors of nuclear facilities are open to them so that they can profit from others' expertise in the manufacture of nuclear weapons.

The Syrian Arab Republic has always stressed that it attaches great importance to the creation of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East, and it would like to express its grave concern over Israel's insurmountable obstruction of that process. Israel refuses to accede to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), despite the fact that the international community knows full well that by doing so it is greatly undermining the Treaty's credibility and universality. Israel's refusal obstructs the establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East, despite the good intentions of the other parties concerned and despite the other proposals that have been put forward to this effect.

The Syrian Arab Republic believes that a nuclear-weapon-free zone should be created in the Middle East.

This requires, first, the support of Israel, the only State of the region that possesses a nuclear arsenal and nuclear facilities. It must accede to the NPT, subject its nuclear installations to the safeguards of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and eliminate its entire nuclear arsenal. All these measures are prerequisites to the establishment of such a zone.

Secondly, the United Nations is the appropriate forum for carrying out serious negotiations to enable all States of the Middle East to work jointly for the establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone. Furthermore, the Syrian Arab Republic supports the convening of the fourth special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament in order to review and assess progress in the implementation of the outcome of the 1978 first special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament. This would offer the opportunity to review the major aspects of disarmament in order to adapt it to the new world situation. To that end, the international community and international opinion must be mobilized in favour of eliminating nuclear weapons and other weapons of

mass destruction and of reducing conventional weapons.

As I said, the Syrian Arab Republic supports the idea of convening the fourth special session and stresses the need for the true political will of the international community to implement the outcome and decisions of the first special session. It would be an opportunity to pave the way for the complete elimination of nuclear weapons and to carry out full and complete disarmament under effective international control. In the course of the second and third special sessions, we were unable to obtain a consensus. As a result, the Syrian Arab Republic feels that the General Assembly should adopt a resolution unanimously to reflect the international community's genuine readiness to convene a fourth session as soon as possible. The results achieved by the 2000 NPT Review Conference confirmed the need for the fourth special session to focus on the international community's priority of fully eliminating nuclear weapons and to set a timetable for it.

In July 1996, the International Court of Justice issued an Advisory Opinion on the legality of the threat or use of nuclear weapons. In that Opinion, the Court stated that, given the unique characteristics of those weapons, in particular their destructive capacity, their capacity to cause untold human suffering, and their ability to cause damage to generations to come, the threat or use of nuclear weapons would be a potential catastrophe. The destructive capacity of nuclear weapons cannot be limited in time or space. They can destroy all human civilization and the global ecology.

The Syrian Arab Republic, on the basis of its principled policy of promoting international peace and security, in accordance with the purposes and principles of the Charter and within the general framework of complete and total disarmament, has done its utmost to support the United Nations resolutions on disarmament. In 1986, the Syrian Arab Republic acceded to the NPT and joined its safeguards system. The Syrian Arab Republic supports General Assembly resolution 55/33 X on the follow-up to the Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice on the legality of the threat or use of nuclear weapons. The Syrian Arab Republic invites Members to take practical measures to establish a timetable for the elimination of nuclear weapons under effective international control.

The Syrian Arab Republic is closely following the issue of transparency in armaments in all its aspects and endorses the statement of the Arab Group. The Syrian Arab Republic feels that States Members of the United Nations must take the concerns of the Arab States into consideration in reviewing this important aspect of the Organization's work. In considering issues related to weapons of mass destruction, nuclear weapons in particular, the Organization must also take into consideration the prevailing situation in the Middle East, including Israel's occupation of Arab territories, its possession of nuclear weapons — which Arab States do not possess — and its refusal to place its nuclear facilities under IAEA safeguards.

The delegation of the Syrian Arab Republic participated in the United Nations Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects, held in New York from 9-20 July 2001. In this connection, we welcome in particular the paragraphs of the report addressing the rights of peoples to self-defence, resistance of foreign occupation and self-determination. My delegation believes that the Programme of Action adopted at the Conference is a good step forward, although it did not live up to all the aspirations and expectations of every delegation.

In conclusion, my delegation assures you, Sir, of its full support towards the achievement of constructive results in the course of the Committee's efforts to reach our ultimate objective: nuclear disarmament and the destruction of weapons of mass destruction. In that way can we spare our peoples the pain of a destructive war.

Mr. Hoang Chi Trung (Viet Nam): The Vietnamese delegation wishes to congratulate you, Sir, on your unanimous election to the chairmanship of the First Committee. We are fully confident that, under your stewardship, the Committee will arrive at a very fruitful outcome. Our felicitations also go to the other members of the Bureau. We wish also to thank Ambassador Mya Than of Myanmar for his contributions to the work of the Committee as its Chairman at the last session. We highly appreciate the concerted efforts and dedication of Under-Secretary-General Jayantha Dhanapala to the work of the Committee and to the cause of disarmament and security as a whole.

At the outset, my delegation wishes to associate itself fully with the statement made by the Permanent

Representative of Myanmar on Tuesday in his capacity as coordinator for the Association of South-East Asian Nations. My delegation would like to comment on a couple of other points.

First and foremost, my delegation would like to join previous speakers in this debate in voicing our strongest condemnation of the heinous terrorist attacks in New York and Washington, D.C. We wish to extend our deepest condolences and sympathy to the families of the victims of the attacks and to the people and the Government of the United States.

In the wake of the events of 11 September, the horrible risk of the use of devices of mass destruction must be lurking in the backs of many minds. The scale of destruction would have been beyond our wildest imagination, as was pointed out in various newspapers in this country, if the terrorists had brought with them on board one of the Boeing 767s that crashed into the Twin Towers just one pound of uranium.

Mr. Kofi Annan, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, is one of those who were very concerned about this. Addressing the General Assembly on 1 October the Secretary-General said it was hard to imagine how the tragedy could have been worse. He went further to stress that there is much we could do to help prevent future terrorist acts from being carried out with weapons of mass destruction. My delegation fully supports this view and strongly believes that our debate should focus on the efforts to promote the total elimination of weapons of mass destruction, nuclear and biological weapons in particular.

As regards disarmament in general, Viet Nam has, over the years, consistently supported regional and international initiatives to achieve the complete elimination of weapons of mass destruction, and we will continue to do so. In the realities of our world today, policies which rely on nuclear deterrence and the retention of huge arsenals of nuclear warheads are simply wrong and unjustifiable on any count. My delegation would like to underline that it is now a matter of urgency and, in many ways, of survival for humankind that the United Nations should redouble its efforts to galvanize the world community to work hard together for a world free from nuclear and biological weapons.

One way to do this has been pointed out in the Millennium Declaration of the United Nations, which has been endorsed by all the heads of State and Government of the Member States of the Organization: to convene an international conference to identify ways and means to eliminate the danger of weapons of mass destruction, particularly nuclear weapons. It is high time that preparation for such a conference went ahead to ensure its successful outcome.

In this connection, Viet Nam wishes to emphasize that the surest guarantee against the use of weapons of mass destruction is the total prohibition of such weapons. We hold that the conclusion by the United Nations of a convention banning nuclear weapons is overdue. One of the objectives of the international conference, in our view, is to reach some agreement on this imperative.

We are going to hold the first preparatory meeting for the Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons next summer. This will be an opportunity to assess progress in the implementation of the provisions of this important regime. It is unfortunate to note that the nuclear States are yet to be forthcoming in realizing the commitments they made under article VI of the Treaty and, more recently, at the 2000 Review Conference. Viet Nam wishes to join other delegations in calling on nuclear States to carry out without any further delay the practical steps agreed upon in the Final Document of the Review Conference as initial building blocks leading towards the total elimination of nuclear weapons.

It is encouraging, however, to recognize that the two principal nuclear States have repeatedly pledged to work harder together to accelerate the START process with a view to reducing more drastically their stockpiles of nuclear warheads and their delivery systems.

Nevertheless, my country continues to note with great concern the negative implications of the ongoing efforts to develop and deploy anti-ballistic missile systems, as well as the determined pursuit of advanced military technologies for deployment in outer space. This tendency is very worrisome to many countries, including my own, for it may trigger another costly and wasteful arms race, which mankind as a whole cannot afford. Once again, we wish to underline that the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty is a cornerstone of international strategic stability, and its abrogation holds grave consequences for world peace and security. We therefore call on the States parties to the Treaty to respect its integrity and comply fully with its provisions.

As the Assembly may know, Viet Nam, on behalf of the member countries of the Association of South-East Asian Nations, has introduced a paper on 10 measures leading to a world free of nuclear weapons at the recent session of the United Nations Disarmament Commission. Our contribution has been reflected in the Chairman's working paper, which will serve as a basis for the formulation of guidelines on ways and means to promote nuclear disarmament. My delegation sincerely hopes that at the coming session of the Disarmament Commission, those measures will be agreed upon and new momentum will be created in our common efforts to acquit ourselves of this urgent task. One of the immediate tasks described in our paper is to enable the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty to enter into force as soon as possible. There are several obstacles to overcome, and even greater and more consistent efforts are called for. We look forward to the rescheduled conference to facilitate this objective.

Bioterrorism is a word often heard in this city these days after the tragic events which took place a few miles from this room. Even if what we hear is only rumours or hearsay, efforts to strengthen the compliance with the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention are needed as urgently as ever. In this context, my delegation regrets that the negotiations on a protocol setting up a verification and compliance regime for the Convention have not been successful. We earnestly hope that the differences will soon be resolved and fruitful negotiations on this regime will be resumed at the upcoming Review Conference.

At this session, in a very turbulent year, the disarmament and security agenda for the First Committee is fuller than ever before. We encourage you, Mr. Chairman, to engage all delegations in the more urgent tasks. On our part, we pledge that we will cooperate fully with all other delegations and with your Bureau to make our meetings and discussions as rewarding and fruitful as we all expect.

Mr. Ordzhonikidze (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): I would first like to congratulate you, Sir, on your election to the very honourable post of Chairman of the First Committee. We know you as an experienced diplomat who enjoys a great deal of authority in the United Nations. We would like to express the hope that under your enlightened chairmanship the Committee will be able to deal successfully with the problems on its agenda. We would also like to congratulate the other members of the Bureau.

The current session of the General Assembly is taking place at a tragic moment when one of the United Nations Member States, the United States, has suffered an unprecedented and truly barbaric act of aggression committed by international terrorism. We would like to express our sincere and profound condolences to the victims and families of those who died. Russia has first-hand experience of terrorism. That is why we clearly understand what the American people are feeling. The President of the Russian Federation, Mr. Vladimir Putin, stressed that the Russian people fully shared the pain of the American people and offered their support.

The large-scale terrorist attack perpetrated against the United States on 11 September shows where the true challenge to security comes from. All civilized States should fight against such challenges, especially given the threat posed by the potential use by terrorists of weapons of mass destruction.

We believe that joint efforts should be undertaken, in compliance with existing agreements, but building upon them, to ensure the global rule of law. The previous century was a period of wars and creative work, of the arms race and disarmament, of serious conflicts and success in the settlement of some of them. Much has been done, especially in recent years, to establish a world order based on equal security, common responsibility and the cooperation of all States. But much more has yet to be done if the decades of nuclear confrontation and global tension are to be succeeded by an era of real disarmament, strategic stability and constructive partnership.

Russia's foreign policy priorities undoubtedly lie in the field of disarmament ideology. Having ratified a number of key disarmament instruments — the START II Treaty and the package of START II agreements signed in New York in 1997, including those relating to the anti-ballistic missile Treaty, and the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty — Russia has confirmed in deed, and not just in word, its commitment to honour its nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation obligations. We urge other countries to follow our example. Russia supports the outcome of the 2000 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT). We would like to underline the fact that that Conference graphically illustrated that the NPT remains one of the most significant mechanisms in the field of arms control and disarmament — a model of interaction for

the members of the international community and an example of effective multilateral diplomacy.

The Committee is well aware of the initiatives put forward by the President of the Russian Federation, Mr. Putin, in the field of nuclear disarmament. What we are proposing is a radical reduction in the strategic nuclear weapons of Russia and the United States — to 1,500 nuclear warheads for each of the parties by 2008, and perhaps to even lower levels thereafter. By way of comparison, I remind the Committee that, according to the terms of the START I Treaty, by 2001 the parties were supposed to have reduced their strategic nuclear arsenals to 6,000 nuclear warheads. We look forward to a concrete response from the American side in the framework of the intensive dialogue we have started with the United States on the interrelated issues of strategic defensive and offensive armaments.

Our positive agenda in the field of international security is straightforward and comprehensible. It is to seek lasting peace and true disarmament, which can be achieved only through common efforts and a real contribution by each State to the common system of strategic stability, while preserving and strengthening existing instruments, treaties and agreements in this field. The Russian concept of a global control system in the area of the non-proliferation of missiles and missile technologies would make it possible to resolve concrete issues of international security through constructive interaction, while strengthening, rather than destroying, whatever positive achievements have been created in this area in recent years.

In our dialogue with other nations, we continue to pursue a policy aimed at the more active use of the potential of the United Nations, especially that offered by the relationship between the permanent members of the Security Council. In this connection, we recall the Russian proposal to begin a consultation process on strategic stability issues between the five nuclear States that are permanent members of the Security Council, with a view to unblocking the way to genuine nuclear disarmament. We also draw the attention of the Committee to the initiative put forward to the President of the Russian Federation at the Millennium Summit with regard to ensuring energy supplies for the sustainable development of humankind, a radical solution to the problems posed by the proliferation of nuclear weapons and to the problem of global environmental improvement. Efforts to implement this initiative are already under way in the framework of the International Atomic Energy Agency, and we welcome them.

In this context, I cannot fail to mention once again the role and significance of the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty, which was, and continues to be, a system-creating backbone of strategic stability. The need to preserve and strengthen that Treaty was also clearly reaffirmed in the Final Document of the 2000 NPT Review Conference.

At the current session of the General Assembly, the delegation of Russia, together with those of China and Belarus, will again introduce a draft resolution on the preservation and strengthening of the ABM Treaty. In so doing, we will posit the need for the further mobilization of the efforts of the international community to prevent the undermining of the existing system of arms control and disarmament treaties and agreements.

Of course, the international community must look to the future and move towards elaborating new frameworks for strategic relations. Speaking metaphorically, however, I would like to say that we should not destroy the house that we have been safely living in before a new one has been built. In his statement to the General Assembly on 24 September, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, Mr. Ivanov, dealt in detail with the important subject of preventing the arms race in outer space. He listed concrete elements that could form the basis of a comprehensive agreement against deploying, using or threatening to use weapons in outer space. The Minister also made a new proposal to declare a moratorium on the deployment of weapons in outer space, pending such an agreement. We are open to frank discussion about how to set in motion negotiations on these important issues.

Another priority issue for Russia at the current session is the security of international information. The Russian initiative in this area has been prompted by the need to identify and try to eliminate, at the international level, the true threats to international stability and security that have arisen in connection with the new information technology-related phase of the global scientific and technological revolution.

In this context, Russia will introduce at this session an updated version of the resolution entitled "Developments in the field of information and telecommunications in the context of international

security". We hope that, as in previous years, it will be adopted by consensus.

Russia also favours the creation of an efficient verification mechanism for the Biological Weapons Convention, in the form of a legally binding protocol. The negotiations on this subject should be continued on a multilateral basis.

As for the 1925 Geneva Protocol on the Prohibition of the Use in War of Asphyxiating, Poisonous or Other Gases, and of Bacteriological Methods of Warfare, Russia withdrew in December 2000 the reservations previously made by the Soviet Union with regard to this document. We would encourage other nations to follow our example. We view the Chemical Weapons Convention as an effective instrument for strengthening international peace and security, and we advocate ensuring its universal character.

We commend the work in this area carried out by the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and welcome the relationship agreement on cooperation between the OPCW and the United Nations. We are in favour of developing this cooperation. We think it useful to regularly discuss at General Assembly sessions issues relating to the implementation of the Convention banning chemical weapons.

We are convinced that if the problems of preventing and restricting the illicit proliferation of small arms and light weapons in the world are not resolved it will be impossible to settle conflicts, ensure the security of people or maintain stable economic growth. The United Nations Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects, held in July this year, identified major areas for action by the international community in this field. The most important thing now is to get down to active and concrete follow-up work and to implement the decisions made at the Conference.

We would like to note the significance of the 1980 "inhumane weapons" Convention (CCW) as an important international legal document regulating the use of concrete types of conventional arms. We are ready to support and facilitate in every way the implementation of all proposals put forward in the course of its review process, with a view to further strengthening and ensuring the universal character of the Convention and its protocols. The Second Review Conference to be held in December this year should be a milestone in this regard.

We would like to draw attention to the insufficiently effective use that has been made of the potential of the Conference on Disarmament. It is our firm intention to give, through collective efforts, an impetus to the work of this unique forum, which undoubtedly would help to serve our common interests. Russia has already presented its proposals on this issue.

The multifaceted nature and urgency of disarmament and non-proliferation issues imply that the time has now come to convene a special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament. We actively support the idea of holding such a session.

In conclusion, I assure you, Sir, and all my colleagues of the readiness of the Russian delegation to continue to confirm its commitment to the goals and objectives in the area of international security by practical steps.

The meeting rose at 12.35 p.m.